



Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education – Paper #18 – Capturing the impact of Narragunnawali

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to track and analyse engagement with Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program, and the relationship this engagement has with a range of observed outcomes. We draw on multiple sources of data – administrative data collected as part of the operation of the program, and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children. We find very strong evidence that those schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that engage with Narragunnawali have improved outcomes, from the perspective of reconciliation in education.

Acknowledgements

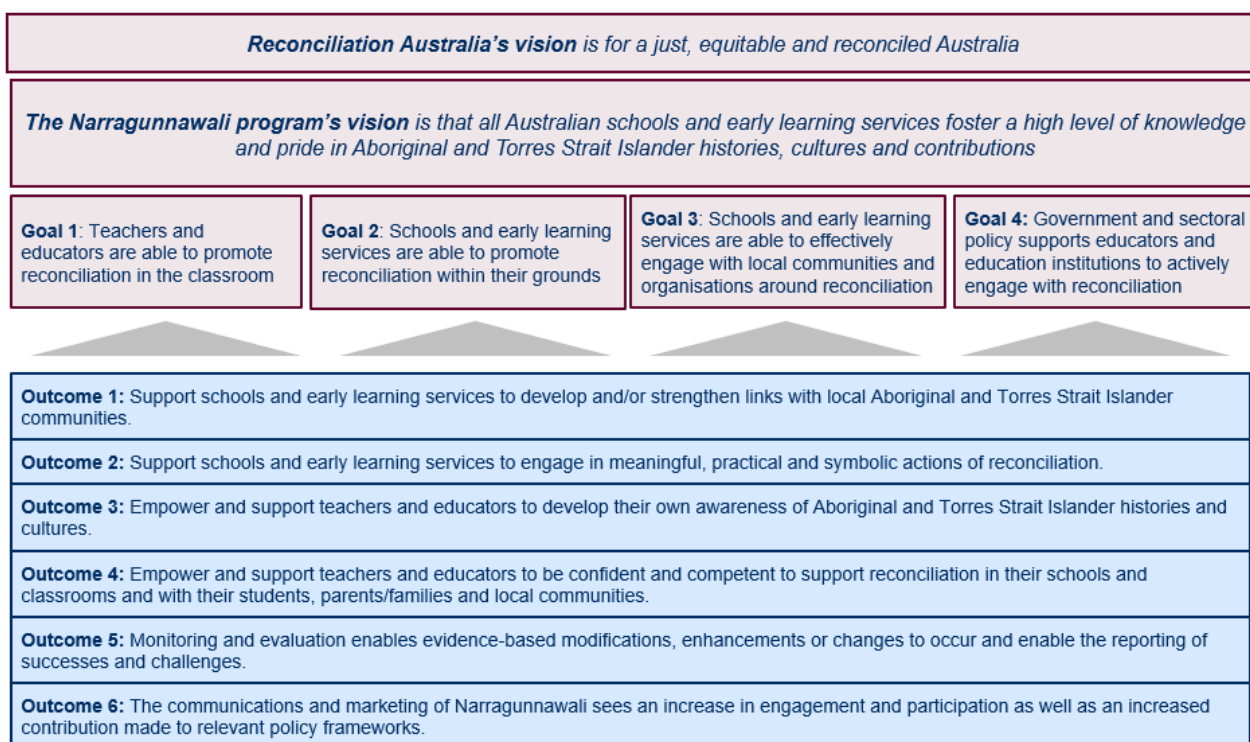
The analysis presented in this paper was supported by funds and data from Reconciliation Australia as part of an evaluation of the Narragunnawali program. Reconciliation Australia's support and comments on an earlier version of this paper were greatly appreciated. The results presented, however, should be attributed to the named author only.

1 Introduction and overview of Narragunnawali

Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education ('Narragunnawali') program is designed to support all Australian schools and early learning services in developing a high level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. While it is intended that this knowledge and pride be held by all students and educators in Australia, regardless of their Indigenous status, it is also intended that there will be flow-on benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families and communities.

Narragunnawali (pronounced narra-gunna-wally) is a word from the language of the Ngunnawal people meaning alive, wellbeing coming together and peace (the Ngunnawal people are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands in and around Canberra, where Reconciliation Australia's head office is located). The word *narragunnawali* is used with the permission of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

The following diagram captures the vision, goals, and projected outcomes of the Narragunnawali program throughout Phase 3 (September 2020-June 2022) of the Evaluation:



The Narragunnawali program consists of four key areas (Reconciliation Action Plans, Professional Learning, Curriculum Resources and Awards), each of which are simultaneously underpinned by dedicated foci on Research and Evaluation, Stakeholder Engagement, and both Education Sector and Regional Engagement. The program comprises an online platform which is free to access and provides practical ways to introduce meaningful reconciliation initiatives in the classroom, around the school/service and with the community. While the platform can be accessed by any individual interested in reconciliation in education, it also provides a framework and aligned resources for driving reconciliation at the whole school or early learning service level. Through the Narragunnawali platform, schools and early learning services can develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), and teachers and educators can access professional learning and curriculum resources to support the implementation of reconciliation initiatives.

The program and actions within the Narragunnawali RAP framework are designed to address the five interrelated and interdependent dimensions of reconciliation that Reconciliation Australia has identified. These are: Race Relations, Equality and Equity, Institutional Integrity, Unity, and Historical Acceptance. Specifically:

- Within the Race Relations dimension all Australians understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous cultures, rights, and experiences. This, in turn, fosters stronger relationships based on trust and respect and that are free of racism.
- Equality and Equity recognises the need for equal participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a range of life opportunities. Further, that the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and upheld.
- The Institutional Integrity dimension acknowledges that active support for reconciliation from our nation's political, business and community structures is needed.
- Unity is reflected through an Australian society which values and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage as a proud part of our shared national identity.
- Lastly, the Historical Acceptance dimension documents the importance of all Australians understanding and accepting the wrongs of the past and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Additionally, that Australia makes amends for these past policies and practices, and ensures that they are never repeated.

1.1 Evaluation of Narragunnawali

Since early 2015, the Australian National University (ANU) has been involved in the evaluation and monitoring of Narragunnawali. One of the principles of the evaluation was a genuine collaboration between the ANU project team and Reconciliation Australia (RA). In addition to a collaborative approach, four further principles were followed as part of the methodology. Specifically, the project aimed to:

- Use a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical techniques;
- Provide information to Reconciliation Australia at regular intervals in order to ensure lessons learned can be incorporated as the program is developed;
- Collect information where possible from those who are directly involved in Narragunnawali; and
- Make use of available data where possible and data collected as part of the program.

For Phase 1 of the evaluation (2015-2018), the methodological approach was structured around a set of questions. Given the voluntary nature of the program, there are a set of main questions guiding the analysis:

- **Process:**
 - Why are certain schools and early learning services participating and others not?
 - For those who are participating, what are the strengths, weaknesses and suggested improvements for the program?
- **Outcomes:**
 - For those who are participating, what is the effect of the program on four main outcomes, namely does Narragunnawali lead to:
 - A higher level of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage?
 - A higher level of pride in our shared national identity?

- Increased trust between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the rest of the Australian population?
- Reduced prejudice experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and teachers?

For Phase 2 of the evaluation, a more expansive set of research questions were used to guide the analysis. These questions were structured around 7 themes or areas as outlined below. While Phase 2 originally included for research from January 2018 to June 2020, the questions were designed to support a longer-term research agenda that aligned with Reconciliation Australia's 2017-2022 Research Agenda. These were

1. Growth, uptake and usage
2. Information sharing and within-institution knowledge
3. Effectiveness of resources
4. Teacher knowledge and confidence
5. Community interaction and engagement
6. Student experience
7. Expansion of Narragunnawali

During phase 2 of the evaluation, there was unprecedented disruption to Australian schools and early learning services. These disruptions have been primarily caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic and the 2019-2020 Australian bushfire season (known now as the Black Summer bushfires).

As well as being aligned with the methodological principles outlined below, the aims and objectives of Phase 3 of the Narragunnawali Evaluation (2020 to 2022) will align closely with the Goals and Vision of the Narragunnawali Strategic Plan:

With this in mind the overarching line of inquiry for Phase 3 of the Evaluation of Narragunnawali is:

To what extent, and to what effect, do the Narragunnawali program's strategic priorities and enabling initiatives – and the resources and activities that these encompass – meet the program's goals and intended outcomes, in alignment with the five dimensions of reconciliation and Reconciliation Australia's wider organisational vision and strategic goals?

Key evaluation questions for Phase 3 are:

- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali support schools and early learning services to develop and/or strengthen links with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali support schools and early learning services to engage in meaningful, practical and symbolic actions of reconciliation?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali empower and support teachers and educators to develop their own awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does Narragunnawali empower and support teachers and educators to be confident to support reconciliation in their schools and classrooms, their students, and their students' families?

- To what extent, and to what effect, does the communications and marketing of Narragunnawali see an increase in engagement and participation in the program and wider reconciliation-in-education initiatives, as well as increased contribution made to relevant made to relevant policy frameworks?
- To what extent, and to what effect, does or could monitoring and evaluation enable evidence-based modifications, enhancements or changes to the Narragunnawali program to occur, and enable the reporting of programmatic successes and challenges?

There have been three papers released from Phase 3 of the evaluation, numbered in series as part of the overall evaluation. In Paper #15 – *The State of Reconciliation in Education, from safe to brave* we used four sources of data to help understand the state of reconciliation in education as at May 2021, and as Australia seemed to be moving towards the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. The delayed roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations and subsequent third wave of infections meant that this recovery was interrupted and that the education (and lives) of children in much of Australia were once again disrupted by the pandemic. Nonetheless, the findings showed that there was generally positive news regarding reconciliation in education in that there has been a continued increase in the proportion of the general community who feel that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is very important, when asked across repeated opt-in, internet based panels. Within the community of institutions engaged in the Narragunnawali RAP development process, there has also been an increase in the proportion of schools and early learning services that report to regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching.

There were other findings in that paper that were less positive with regards to reconciliation in education. There was relatively low levels of support amongst adults in Australia for aspects of the school system related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. Only 40.8 per cent of respondents felt it was definitely the role of schools to ‘Provide opportunities for students to learn about reconciliation or engage with reconciliation activities at school’ and only 43.6 per cent of respondents saying it was definitely a role of schools to ‘Build on and include local, regional and national cultural knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in learning’. Schools and early learning services involved in Narragunnawali were also still unlikely to say that they have regularly engaged with the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community in which they are based.

In Paper #16 – Engaging in the broader policy discussion, the aim of the paper was to consider empirically the link that might exist between ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education’ and ‘reconciliation in education’, and the positionality of the Narragunnawali program within diverse Indigenous Education policy frameworks. To do this, the main focus of the paper was a discussion of the education outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young adults in Australia, including some new analysis of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and literacy and numeracy measurement.

The paper documented how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, youth and their families engage in education at high rates at all levels of education. However, detailed analysis of NAPLAN data showed that not only do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have measured literacy and numeracy levels that are lower than for the non-Indigenous population in early primary school, but that these outcomes do not increase by as much between Year 3 and 5 or Years 5 and 7 for an otherwise equivalent non-Indigenous student (controlling for observable characteristics like age, sex, and socioeconomic status).

A focus of Paper #16 was on the policy frameworks in Australia that incorporate education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth. The main framework is the Closing the Gap framework which, although incorporating substantially more input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations than previous versions, still has a number of limitations. In particular, there are no targets set for the school years, and that there is no focus on the attitudes or outcomes of non-Indigenous students, with no attempt within the framework to increase knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, culture or history, nor any focus on reducing the level of discrimination perpetuated by predominantly non-Indigenous Australians on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

In the most recent paper in the series (Paper #17), the ANU focused on the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge of parents and carers with regards to reconciliation. We examined this through the 'Reconciliation in Education: The perspectives of Parents and Carers' or RE-P&C survey, a survey of 3,558 parents and carers undertaken in December/January 2021/22. A few key findings from that paper are worth highlighting. First, there is a somewhat limited level of awareness of the Narragunnawali program amongst the sample of parents and carers. This awareness is higher for people from certain backgrounds – younger parents and carers; those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; those with a greater number of children; and those with a degree qualification. However, across the sample, and even within these groups, awareness is quite low. There is support for a program like Narragunnawali, with almost half of parents/carers in the survey (48.0 per cent) saying that in general the institution their child attends definitely should participate in the program, with a further 39.1 per cent saying that the institution probably should.

There is some uncertainty about the types of activities related to reconciliation that occur within schools and early learning services. More than two-thirds of respondents did not know whether or not their child's school or early learning service had a RAP. However, a positive finding from the analysis was that those schools which did have a RAP (that the parent/carer was aware of) were much more likely to have undertaken other reconciliation-related activities. RAPs do appear to be supportive of such activities, it is just that they are not always known about by parents/carers.

It does not appear, however, that having a RAP in a school or early learning has a clear positive impact on the attitudes of parents and carers. The survey asked about sixteen aspects of reconciliation and the level of support for them from parents and carers. For five of these aspects, the school or early learning service having a RAP had a negative association, with only two of the aspects of reconciliation having a positive association (and the remainder having no association). This does not in any way imply that having a RAP is leading to these negative attitudes. However, it does strongly imply that a program like Narragunnawali could consider more direct interaction with parents and carers, especially as the attitudes of parents and carers are likely to shape the attitudes of their children, and may also blunt some of the effects of the program.

1.2 Outline of the remainder of the paper

The aim of this paper (#18) is to track and analyse engagement with Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program, and the relationship this engagement has with a range of observed outcomes. We draw on three sources of data – administrative data collected as part of the operation of the program (described in Section 2), schools' and early learning services' RAP Reflection Survey responses (Section 3) and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. In Section 5, we provide some concluding comments.

2 Engagement with reconciliation in education

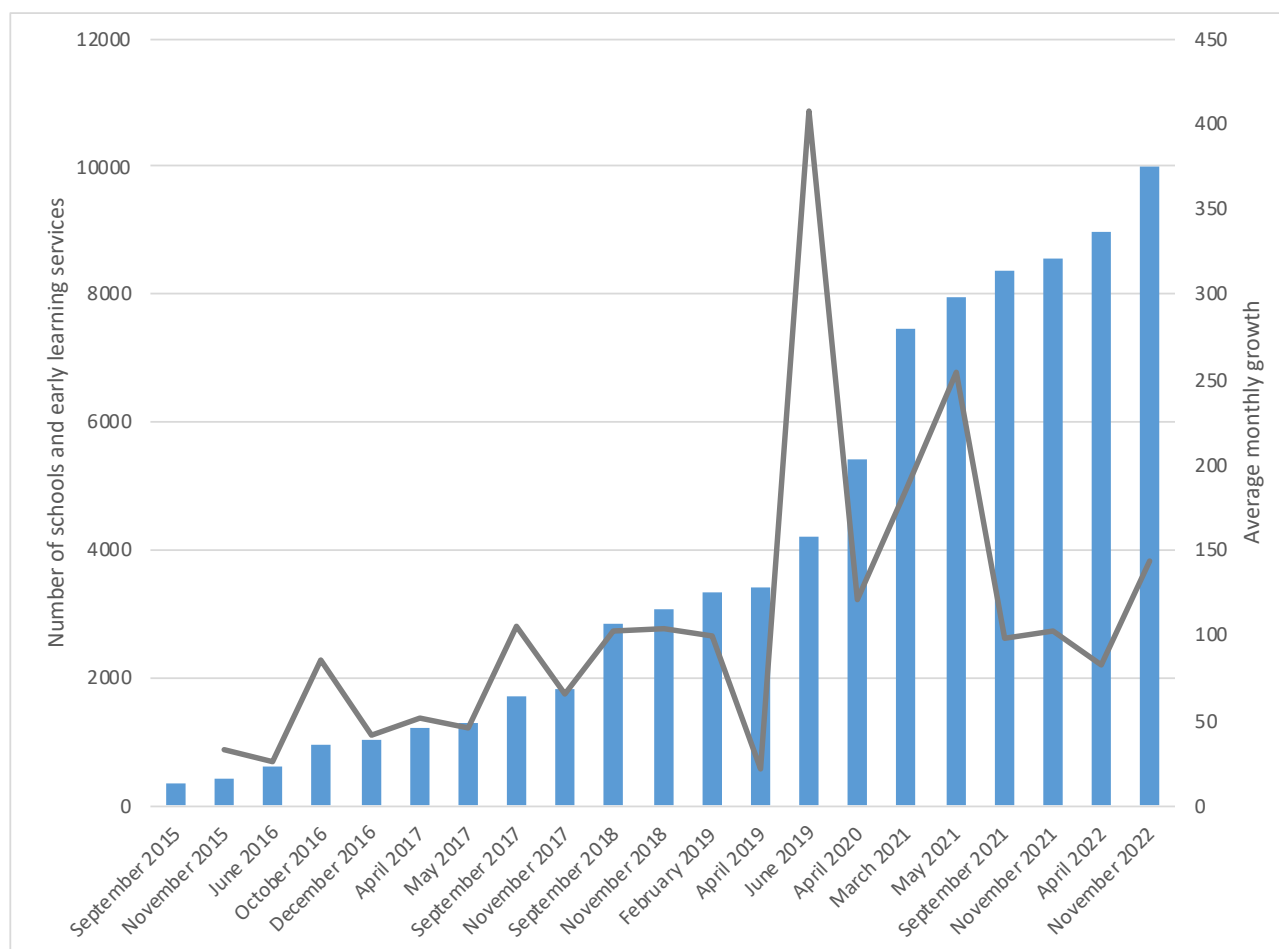
As of the 30th of November 2022, there were approximately 10,410 schools or early learning services had registered to develop a Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) on the Narragunnawali platform. This represents a large, and continued engagement by schools and early learning services with reconciliation in education since the program commenced in 2015 when there were less than 500 RAP process that had commenced in schools and early learning services (Figure 1), as well as since April 2020 at the height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic when there were a little under five-and-a-half thousand schools and early learning services engaged with the program via the RAP development process.

Figure 1 also shows the average monthly increase in schools and early learning services with a RAP since the previous observation. Because reports have been generated on an irregular basis, the horizontal axis values are not represented according to consistent increments. However, the average monthly growth rates adjust for this.

Although there is some observation-to-observation fluctuation over the period, there has been a generally increasing growth, at least up until early 2021. If we take the slightly conservative average of 100 additional institutions per month as the number of non-RAP schools gets less (the actual average over the period is 112 institutions per month), then we would expect that there will be around 15,500 schools and early learning services with or having had a RAP, by the end of June 2027, five years after the end of the current round of funding for the program.

There is always uncertainty projecting that far ahead, but growth has been sustained over a number of years already, and there is no reason to suggest that demand for the program won't continue to grow. If it does, then it is likely that the program will continue to require significant funding in order to deliver a quality service for the schools and early learning services that are engaging with the program, as well as the broader Australian community.

Figure 1 Growth in number of Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) in schools and early learning services



While there has been continued increase in engagement with the Narragunnawali program by schools and early learning services since the commencement of the program, there is substantial variation in the level of engagement at the individual institution level. There is a detailed and well supported process that a school or early learning service needs to go through in order for their draft RAP to be reviewed and published. According to the Reconciliation Australia website:ⁱ

If you have established your RAP Working Group, completed the Reflection Survey, written a Vision for Reconciliation and added at least the required Actions to your RAP, your RAP is ready to be submitted for final review and publication...

When the Principal/Director approves the RAP via the Narragunnawali platform, it is then automatically sent to Reconciliation Australia, who will review the RAP's Vision for Reconciliation and Acknowledgement of Country statements before publishing the RAP.

In total, as at 30 November 2022, there were 1,698 schools and early learning services recorded in the system as having a current published RAP. Although this is an increase from the 1,510 institutions that had a published RAP as of the last report, it is still only a small proportion of all schools and early learning services that have engaged with the Narragunnawali RAP development process.

Using a slightly different aggregation of schools and institutions than the data presented in Figure 1, we can look at some of the factors associated with being registered for a RAP, as well as the factors associated with having a published RAP. This is possible through a

database provided to Reconciliation Australia that includes a list of all schools and early learning services.

Early learning services are far more likely to have registered for a RAP (approximately 45.6 per cent of all Australian early learning services) compared to schools (approximately 27.7 per cent of all Australian primary and secondary schools). For those institutions that have registered to develop a RAP, early learning services are also more likely to have a published RAP than schools – 17.9 per cent compared to 11.8 per cent.

Within these broad groupings there is also substantial variation in engagement. Amongst early learning services, those identified as being Child Care Centres have the highest level of engagement with Narragunnawali (55.0 per cent registered), with preschools (41.5 per cent) and Kindergartens (40.3 per cent) also having relatively high rates of engagement. Family Day Care (19.5 per cent) and Outside School Hour Care (27.9 per cent) have lower levels of engagement. In the school sector, it is Independent (36.7 per cent) and Catholic schools (33.7 per cent) that have relatively high levels of engagement. Government schools, on the other hand, have relatively low levels of engagement.

There are wide difference by State/Territory as well. Combining school and early learning services, South Australia (49.4 per cent) and Queensland (48.3 per cent) have the highest level of engagement, with the Northern Territory (20.5 per cent) and Tasmania (25.1 per cent) having the lowest level. The other four jurisdictions are somewhere in between – ACT (44.2 per cent), NSW (40.4 per cent), Western Australia (32.7 per cent) and Victoria (31.2 per cent).

3 Experiences with Narragunnawali – Reflections from RAP Working Groups

There are a number of potential reasons for why a school or an early learning service may have participated in the Narragunnawali RAP development process. While we do not have information on those institutions that have not decided to engage, one of the key steps as part of the RAP development process is for the RAP Working Group to complete a 'Reflection Survey' (RS).¹ Re-completing the Reflection Survey is also one of the minimally required steps for those schools and early learning services working through the RAP refresh process, 12 months after their RAP's prior publication. The Survey questions have changed a little through time, but as of November 2022 we have data from 5,388 schools and early learning services with consistent questionnaires.

Surveys were completed in a number of ways with the most common being 'Some of the Working Group' having completed the Survey (29.6 per cent of institutions) or the 'RAP Working Group Chair' having completed the Survey in 26.2 per cent of cases. Less common modes of responses were 'All of the RAP Working Group' (22.5 per cent) and 'A RAP Working Group member' (18.4 per cent) with very few Surveys (3.3 per cent) completed by 'Other'.

A copy of the Reflection Survey is available as Attachment 1 to this paper.

¹ https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/storage/media/media-uploads/completing-the-rap-reflection-survey-faqs_Zp5WV.pdf

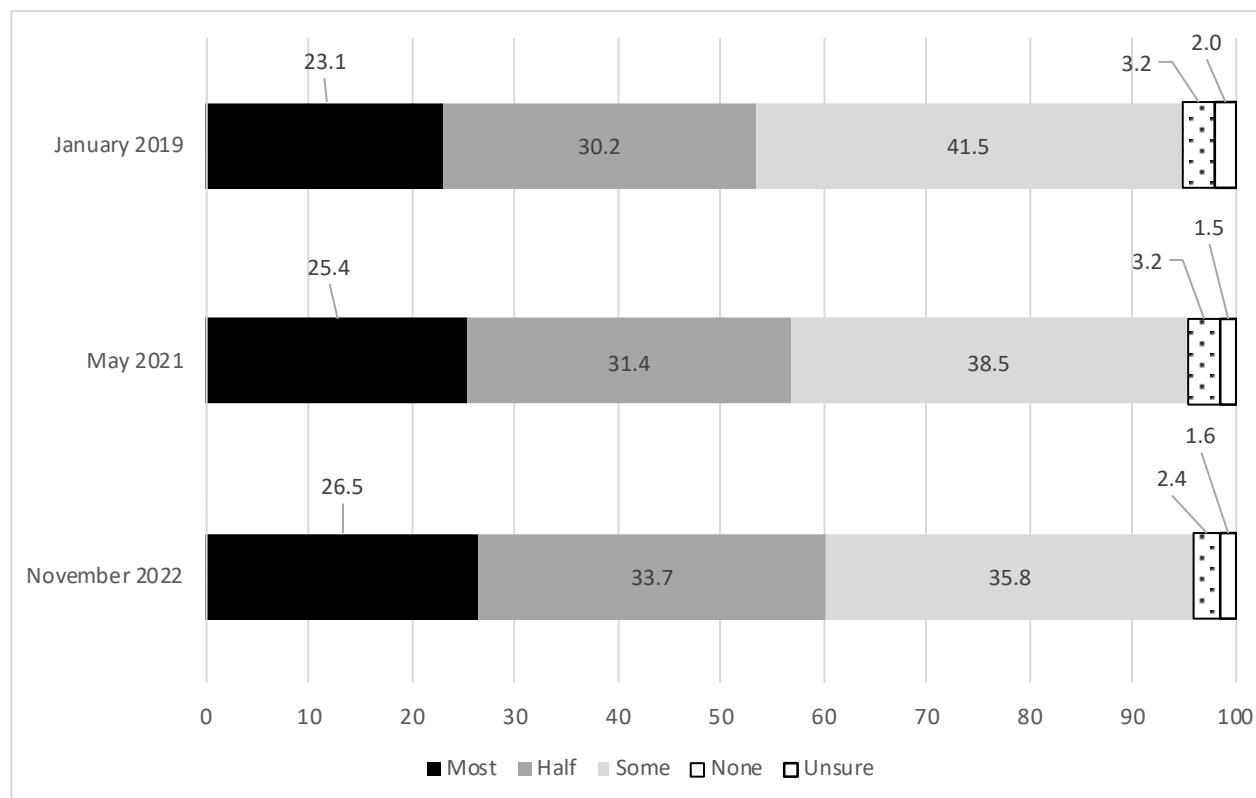
3.1 Current RAP Working Group reflections

The first Survey question asked is 'How many teachers and educators are aware of the Country on which your school or early learning service stands?' The most common response was 'Most (more than 75%)' given by 77.2 per cent of the sample of institutions the most recent time they completed the survey, with an additional 12.0 per cent saying that 'Half (around 50%)' know the Country.

There was a much smaller per cent of RAP Working Groups that said that their 'teachers and educators regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching' Only 26.5 per cent said that 'Most (more than 75%)' do with a further 33.7 per cent saying that 'Half (around 50%)' do. The most common response though, given by 35.8 per cent of institutions was that 'Some (less than 25%)' do. On a more positive note, there were very few institutions (2.4 per cent) where the RAP Working Group felt that none of their teachers or education were able to do so, and an even smaller per cent (1.6 per cent) that were unsure.

Although the proportion of schools and early learning services that incorporate histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues is still relatively low, there has been an increase since early 2019 (Figure 2) and mid 2021. In January 2019, only 23.1 per cent of institutions said that they did so most of the time, with a further 30.2 per cent that said they did half of the time. Combined, there was an increase from 53.3 per cent of institutions that incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching at least half the time in January 2019 to 56.8 per cent in May 2021 and then again to 60.2 per cent in November 2022. This may not necessarily be attributable to Narragunnawali itself, but it does give some indication that there has been an improvement in that aspect of reconciliation over a reasonably short time period.

Figure 2 Per cent of schools and early learning services that regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching – January 2019, May 2021, and November 2022



While there is a reasonably even split between those schools that incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues and those that do not, the vast majority of teachers and educators have not in the last year ‘collaborated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to prepare and deliver lessons’ (29.0 per cent of institutions) or only done so some of the time (42.9 per cent). Only 12.9 per cent of institutions said that their teachers and educators had done it half the time, with a further 11.4 per cent of teachers and educators that did it most of the time. This aligns with some of the findings from Phase 2 of the evaluation, with schools and early learning services reporting challenges building relationships with community, despite their understanding of the significance of doing so, and of the benefits that can arise when doing so.

RAP Working Groups were very unlikely to say that their teachers and educators are not ‘aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are a priority within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework.’ Only 2.3 per cent of institutions answered no, with a further 31.6 per cent saying somewhat. The vast majority of institutions (63.9 per cent) answered yes to the question of whether their school or early learning service is aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are a priority within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework.

Compared to the above finding, there were fewer institutions that said that teachers and educators actively engaged with meeting or maintaining proficiency in the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers focus areas 1.4 and 2.4 (for primary and secondary schools) and the ACECQA National Quality Standard (for early learning). A little under half of institutions said yes (47.4 per cent) with a further 37.7 per cent saying somewhat. Only 7.1 per cent of institutions said no, with a relatively high proportion of RAP Working Groups saying that they were unsure (7.9 per cent).

There were not many schools or early learning services that did not fly at least one of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags (20.7 per cent), with most schools (65.7 per cent) flying both. In addition, 32.0 per cent of respondents said that aside from flags, their school or early learning service demonstrated 'respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures through other permanent, visible symbols' with a further 56.6 per cent saying that they did, but would like to do more.

There was a mix of responses when RAP Working Groups were asked 'How many of your staff members have undertaken some level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness/competence training?' The most common response was 'some,' given by 36.3 per cent, with a not insignificant minority (7.1 per cent) saying none of their staff members had. A further 5.6 per cent of RAP Working Group respondents were unsure, signalling a potential need for greater sharing of this information. Combined, there were roughly half of schools or early learning services where half (18.2 per cent) or most (32.8 per cent) of staff members were reported to have undertaken cultural awareness/competence training.

The vast majority of schools and early learning services (76.3 per cent) support staff 'to participate in cultural awareness/competence training and other professional learning around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives.' It is not surprising that institutions that provide such support are more likely to have most of their staff having undertaken such training (37.9 per cent) compared to institutions that do not support staff (15.2 per cent). However, what is somewhat surprising is that even with such support, the proportion of staff that have undertaken such training is reasonably low.

Compared to cultural awareness training, there is a much smaller proportion of institutions (47.4 per cent) engaged with the Narragunnawali RAP development process that have a dedicated budget that includes 'specific provision for reconciliation initiatives'. Compared to this, almost two-thirds of schools (62.3 per cent) has an anti-racism strategy. For both these questions, however, there was a very high level of uncertainty amongst those who completed the Survey. Around one-quarter (24.4 per cent) of respondents were unsure about the budget for reconciliation activities, with around one-fifth (21.4 per cent) unsure about whether there is an anti-racism strategy in their schools/services. One role of Narragunnawali that has been under-invested in may therefore be to increase intra-institutional awareness of what is going on within schools and early learning services with regard to specific RAP Actions/reconciliation initiatives.

One way to increase awareness is through discussion at staff meetings. Indeed, Staff Engagement with RAP is one of the 14 minimally required RAP Actions within the Narragunnawali framework. RAP Working Groups were asked 'How often in the last term (approximately 10 weeks) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives discussed at staff meetings?' Only 17.1 per cent of institutions said 'Never' with a further 4.3 per cent unsure. The most common response (given by 46.9 per cent of respondents) was 'At some meetings' with a further 18.2 per cent saying that the topic was discussed at most meetings and 13.5 per cent saying that it was discussed at each meeting.

Another way to increase awareness is through discussion at Parents and Citizens (or equivalent) meetings. A little under half (45.7 per cent) said in response to the question of 'in the last term were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives' that they were never discussed at such meetings. Furthermore, only 28.8 per cent of institutions 'have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group or equivalent.'

A slightly higher per cent (33.9 per cent) said that they had 'an employment strategy to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions', though there is a very large amount of uncertainty around this question (34.5 per cent of respondents were unsure).

Most schools and early learning services (60.9 per cent) acknowledged Country regularly in the last 10 weeks (10 or more occasions) with a further 15.4 per cent doing so often (6-10 occasions). Only 5.6 per cent of institutions were reported as never doing so.

There is also a high level of involvement in once-yearly, national level events. Most schools and early learning services (60.9 per cent) said that they always celebrated and promoted NAIDOC Week, with 51.9 per cent of schools saying that they celebrated and promoted National Reconciliation Week.

Compared to the above, there was a far smaller proportion of schools or early learning services that in the last year said they invited 'Elders or Traditional Owners to deliver a Welcome to Country at significant events.' More than half of institutions said that they never did (52.5 per cent) with a further 29.6 per cent saying they did so sometimes (1-2 occasions).

There was also only a small proportion of schools who said that in the last year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, businesses or organisations were 'invited to be involved in activities at your school or early learning service' with 29.8 per cent of institutions saying they never did and 41.4 per cent saying that they did so only sometimes. In addition, very few schools or early learning services said that they regularly or often had 'staff, students or children visit local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sites and/or attend events in the community as part of school or early learning service activities' (6.8 per cent combined). While these are activities that are much harder for an online and nationally focused intervention like Narragunnawali to support, it would appear that it is a large gap in the reconciliation in education process. Returning to the introduction to this paper though, involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, businesses or organisations can be seen as a 'brave' activity for schools to engage in. This could potentially be supported through the Narragunnawali Regional Engagement Program or similar, though inevitably this would involve allocation of financial and staffing resources.

3.2 The impact of participation in Narragunnawali on RAP Working Group reflections

Ideally, it would be helpful to have answers to the same survey questions from a set of schools and early learning services that do not have a RAP or who have not engaged with Narragunnawali. If RAP and non-RAP schools were able to be matched based on observable characteristics (or better still randomly assigned), then it would be possible to compare the results from the two sets of surveys in order to measure the direct impact of the Narragunnawali program on the measures captured in the survey. Almost by definition, however, RAP Reflection Surveys from non-RAP institutions are not available.

Fortunately, however, it is possible to compare the responses of those schools and early learning services that have been in the program for a long period of time and those that have joined reasonably recently. We can take the response to Question 2 as a key outcome measure of Narragunnawali (How many teachers and educators regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching?). If we focus on those institutions that have undertaken a Reflection Survey since May 2021 (of which there are 1,578), then we see reasonably strong evidence of length of time in the program being associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in this measure of reconciliation.

Specifically, we run a probit model with the probability of incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching either half or most of the time as the dependent variable. We label this variable curriculum engagement. We control for whether or not the Reflection Survey was undertaken by an institution or combination of institutions that included a school (as

opposed to an Early Learning Service only), which incidentally was found to have a negative association. Our main variable then is the number of days since the institution's RAP was created, with a greater number of days since creation associated with a higher probability of curriculum engagement.

We can also see this difference descriptively. Those schools and early learning services that have been in the program for the shortest amount of time (quartile 1 – between 16 and 581 days) were the least likely to have had curriculum engagement (61.3 per cent). Those that have been in for the next shortest amount of time (quartile 2 – between 582 to 1,105 days) had a somewhat higher level of curriculum engagement (69.6 per cent), with both groups having a lower level of engagement than those schools and early learning services that had completed a Reflection Survey recently and been in the program for more than the median number of days (75.0 per cent curriculum engagement).

There are a number of reasons why we cannot make causal claims based on this calculation. A key limitation is that those who engaged with Narragunnawali early in the program might have otherwise different characteristics to those that engaged later. In particular, they are likely to be more engaged with the process of reconciliation to start with, or in other words there may be a degree of reverse causality. We do, however, see increased curriculum engagement when we look at change at the individual institution level.

Specifically, we are able to match the responses of 957 schools and early learning services that had completed a survey as of May 31st 2021 and had completed a more recent survey between then and November 30 2022. Within this group 63.2 per cent of institutions were curriculum engaged as of May 31st 2021, compared to 74.6 per cent as of November 2022. Remembering that these are the same institutions that had completed multiple waves of the Reflection Survey, this is a very strong indication using longitudinal data that having a RAP is associated with an increase in regularly and confidently incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching.

There are limits again to the strength of causal inference that can be made using this measure. It may well be that all schools and early learning services increased their level of curriculum engagement over the period due to other factors taking place in society. This cannot be completely discounted in the absence of a control group. However, we do have some circumstantial evidence against this being the case, as only 54.8 per cent of the 1,216 schools and early learning services that created a RAP since May 31st 2021 and that completed a Reflection Survey during that time reported curriculum engagement.

4 Evidence of impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth

The focus of Narragunnawali is on all schools and early learning services, as well as all students and children. A key assumption of the program is that to achieve reconciliation in Australia it is as important and arguably more important that the focus of policy be on non-Indigenous staff and students, rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students only. However, a potential positive additional consequence of a school or early learning service having a RAP is that the experience of education would be improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

4.1 Introducing the LSIC

In this section of the paper, we use data from the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) or Footprints in Time to obtain some additional insight into the outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and how those outcomes relate to the presence or absence of a RAP in a school. The LSIC is the first large-scale longitudinal survey in Australia to focus on the development of Indigenous children. The first wave of the survey was carried out between April 2008 and February 2009, and collected information on 1,687 study children and their families.

The sample for the LSIC was designed around two cohorts—babies (born between December 2006 and November 2007) and children (born between December 2003 and November 2004). The eventual baseline sample comprised of 960 children in the baby cohort and 727 in the child cohort. While the survey administrators aimed to keep the sample within these birth date ranges, in practice there were a minority of children in the sample who fell outside of them. Specifically, 32.2 per cent of the child cohort were younger than 42 months or older than 54 months.

According to the Commonwealth department that administers the LSIC (now known as the Department of Social Services (DSS) but formerly known as the Department of Family, Communities, Housing and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)), the main objective of Footprints in Time is to provide high quality quantitative and qualitative data that can be used to provide a better insight into how a child's early years affect their development. Specifically, the survey is structured around four key research questions:

- What do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to have the best start in life to grow up strong?
- What helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to stay on track or get them to become healthier, more positive and strong?
- How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children raised?
- What is the importance of family, extended family and community in the early years of life and when growing up? (FaHCSIA 2009)

Wave 12 of the survey was conducted in 2019 with a sample of 1,212 respondents. The age range for the majority of students in the B cohort was 11.5 to 13 years, and the age range for the K cohort was 14.5-16 years. Most students were either in Year 6 or Year 7 for the B cohort (31.4 and 26.3 per cent of the sample respectively) or Year 9 or Year 10 for the K cohort (21.0 and 13.5 per cent respectively).

4.2 Relationship between a school RAP and outcomes

The person responding to the survey on behalf of the study child (usually one of the child's parents) was asked if they knew whether the child's school has a RAP. Of those who responded to that question, 47.0 per cent did not know whether the school had a RAP, 42.5 per cent knew that it did, and 10.5 per cent knew that it did not. We use the middle category as our measure of an 'active RAP' with those who did not know or who knew that there was no RAP grouped together as not having an active RAP.

There are three outcomes that we consider as potentially being related to having an active RAP, two reported by the parent/carer and the other reported by the child. We consider the frequency of days that the parent/carer reports that the child had been 'upset or not wanted to go to school' with values of:

1. Rarely or not at all – 779 respondents;
2. At least once a month – 142 respondents;
3. At least once a week – 129 respondents; and

4. Most days – 88 respondents.

The second question also reported by the parent/carer is how well (in their view) the child's teacher or teachers understand the needs of families from an Indigenous background. Responses to this question were:

1. Not at all – 187 respondents;
2. Just OK – 250 respondents;
3. Well – 397 respondents; and
4. Very well – 190 respondents.

The final outcome of interest is asked of the children themselves and simply asks the child to report whether the child's 'school is good for me.' Because this question relies on the child responding there are fewer observations, with values as follows:

1. Never – 16 respondents;
2. Not much – 23 respondents;
3. Little bit – 52 respondents;
4. Fair bit – 97 respondents;
5. Most of the time – 299 respondents; and
6. Always – 593 respondents.

Because these variables are categorical, we measure their association with the presence of an active RAP using an ordered probit model. In addition to our main explanatory variable, we also control for whether or not the school is a non-government school, the child's year level, their gender, the level of remoteness in the area in which they live, and the level of socioeconomic advantage/disadvantage of the area.

The results from the analysis (Table 1) show a very strong relationship between the school having an active RAP and the outcomes in the dataset. Students who attend schools that their parents know have a RAP are less likely to be reported to not want to go to school, more likely to be reported as attending a school that understands their needs, and more likely to say that their school is good for them. All of these differences are statistically significant, with p-values of 0.084, 0.001, and 0.007 respectively.

It can be difficult to establish the size of the association when using an ordered probit model, so we also estimated the difference in mean values for the variables between students who attended a school with an active RAP and those without, applying the numerical values in the lists above. The average value for the school avoidance measure is 1.53 for those schools with an active RAP compared to 1.62 for those schools without. The difference in school understanding is greater – 2.24 for those schools with an active RAP and 2.74 for those without. There is also a large difference in the school positive measure (5.38 for those with an active RAP and 5.12 for those without), which is important because this variable is reported by the children themselves.

There are similar caveats that are relevant for the LSIC analysis to those that we discussed with regards to the Reflection Survey analysis. In particular, causal inference is difficult because the schools that opt into having a RAP may be different to those schools that don't in ways that impact on child outcomes. Nonetheless, the results from the LSIC give *prima facie* evidence that the presence of a RAP in a school leads to better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Table 1 Relationship between child outcomes and presence of a RAP in school, Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children, Wave 12

Explanatory variables	Not want to go to school		School understands needs		School is good for child	
	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.	Coeff.	Signif.
School has a RAP	-0.138	*	0.234	***	0.204	***
School is non-government school	-0.293	***	0.139		0.341	***
Year level child is in	0.022		-0.086	***	-0.169	***
Child is female	-0.049		-0.128	*	0.018	
Inner regional	0.063		-0.073		0.047	
Outer regional	-0.112		0.036		0.052	
Remote	0.004		0.128		0.199	
Very remote	0.086		0.223	**	0.138	
SEIFA Advantage/disadvantage decile	-0.015		-0.004		-0.014	
Cut-point 1	0.515		-1.570		-3.494	
Cut-point 2	0.924		-0.822		-3.132	
Cut-point 3	1.486		0.280		-2.707	
Cut-point 4					-2.243	
Cut-point 5					-1.373	
Sample size	1,103		1,019		1,058	

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

5 Concluding comments

In this paper, we provided three sources of evidence of the impact and importance of the Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program. The simplest evidence is the continued growth in the program, with more educational institutions than ever either having a draft or published Reconciliation Action Plan. The fact that so many schools and early learning services are engaging with the program despite such a crowded education curriculum provides strong support for the ongoing relevance of the program.

We also showed that the longer schools and early learning services are engaged with the program, the more likely they are to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching. We provided evidence for this using cross-sectional data, as well as longitudinal data. Although it wasn't presented in this paper, it should also be noted that there were no outcomes in the Narragunnawali RAP Reflection Survey that worsened the longer an institution was in the program, implying that there were benefits without any observed direct costs.

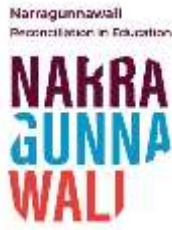
In the final set of data presented, we showed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who attended a school where their parent or carer knew the school had a RAP were less likely to not want to go to school, more likely to think that the school understands the needs of Indigenous students, and more likely to think the school is good for them. This association holds even when we control for many of the observed characteristics that predict uptake of RAPs.

It is important not to be too definitive with claims of causality using the data summarised in this paper. Although the funders or implementers of many programs would like to know whether their program is having an effect, this can be very difficult to assert without particular circumstances holding. To do so, one would normally need a set of institutions that were not part of the program that were otherwise equivalent, confidence that participation in the program was not affected by outcomes or things that impact on outcomes (usually only possible with random assignment), and data from prior to the intervention taking place for both those schools receiving the intervention and the comparison schools. This structure is rare with schools-based interventions in Australia and rarer still with programs that focus on

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. It is not the case and has never been the case for the evaluation of Narragunnawali.

Nonetheless, the results presented in this paper give very strong evidence that certain outcomes are likely to be better for those schools with a RAP compared to those without, and combined with the ongoing demand from schools and early learning services, provides very strong support for the program to continue, albeit with continual improvement that builds on high quality quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Appendix 1 – Reflection survey



Reconciliation Action Plan Reflection Survey

In the classroom

Question 1

How many teachers and educators are aware of the Country on which your school or early learning service stands?

- Most (more than 75%)
- Half (around 50%)
- Some (less than 25%)
- None
- Unsure

Question 2

How many teachers and educators regularly and confidently incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, perspectives and contemporary issues into curriculum planning and teaching?

- Most (more than 75%)
- Half (around 50%)
- Some (less than 25%)
- None
- Unsure



Question 3

In the last year, how many teachers and educators collaborated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to prepare and deliver lessons? For example, inviting local Elders or Traditional Owners to talk to students and children about local histories and cultures.

- Most (more than 75%)
- Half (around 50%)
- Some (less than 25%)
- None
- Unsure

Question 4

Are teachers and educators at your school or early learning service aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are a priority within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No
- Unsure

Question 5

Are teachers and educators actively engaged with meeting or maintaining proficiency in the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers focus areas 1.4 and 2.4 (for primary and secondary schools) and the ACECQA National Quality Standard (for early learning)?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No
- Unsure

Around the school

Question 6

Does your school or early learning service fly or display the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag permanently?

- Both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- Just the Aboriginal flag
- Just the Torres Strait Islander flag
- No
- Unsure

Question 7

Aside from flags, does your school or early learning service demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures through other permanent, visible symbols? For example, plaques, playground markings, paintings, and sculptures.

- Yes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are visible
- Yes, but we would like to do more
- No
- Unsure

Question 8

How many of your staff members have undertaken some level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness/competence training?

- Most (more than 75%)
- Half (around 50%)
- Some (less than 25%)
- None
- Unsure

Question 9

Does your school or early learning service support staff (e.g. leave or financial reimbursement) to participate in cultural awareness/competence training and other professional learning around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 10

Does your school or early learning service budget include specific provision for reconciliation initiatives? For example, for Elders or Traditional Owners to deliver a Welcome to Country?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 11

Does your school or early learning service have an anti-racism strategy?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 12

How often in the last term (approximately 10 weeks) were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives discussed at staff meetings?

- At each meeting
- At most meetings
- At some meetings
- Never
- Unsure

Question 13

How often in the last term (approximately 10 weeks) did your school or early learning service acknowledge Country? For example, at regular events such as assemblies and meetings.

- Regularly (10+ occasions)
- Often (6-10 occasions)
- Sometimes (1-5 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

With the community

Question 14

How often in the last year did your school or early learning service invite Elders or Traditional Owners to deliver a Welcome to Country at significant events?

- Regularly (5+ occasions)
- Often (3-4 occasions)
- Sometimes (1-2 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 15

How often in the last year were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, businesses or organisations invited to be involved in activities at your school or early learning service?

- Regularly (5+ occasions)
- Often (3-4 occasions)
- Sometimes (1-2 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 13

How often in the last term (approximately 10 weeks) did your school or early learning service acknowledge Country? For example, at regular events such as assemblies and meetings.

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- Often (6-10 occasions)
- Sometimes (1-5 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

With the community

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How often in the last year did your school or early learning service invite Elders or Traditional Owners to deliver a Welcome to Country at significant events?

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- Sometimes (1-2 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 15

How often in the last year were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, businesses or organisations invited to be involved in activities at your school or early learning service?

- Regularly (5+ occasions)
- Often (3-4 occasions)
- Sometimes (1-2 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 16

Even though it usually falls outside of term dates, how often in the last 5 years did your school or early learning service celebrate and promote NAIDOC Week?

- Each year (5 years)
- Most years (3 or 4 years)
- Some years (1 or 2 years)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 17

How often in the last 5 years did your school or early learning service celebrate and promote National Reconciliation Week (NRW)?

- Each year (5 years)
- Most years (3 or 4 years)
- Some years (1 or 2 years)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 18

How often in the last term (approximately 10 weeks) did staff, students or children visit local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sites and/or attend events in the community as part of school or early learning service activities?

- Regularly (10+ occasions)
- Often (6-10 occasions)
- Sometimes (1-5 occasions)
- Never
- Unsure

Question 19

Does your school or early learning service engage in learning—or learning about—the First Language(s) of your local area through an inside or outside of hours program delivered or supported by your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 20

How often in the last term were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and perspectives discussed at Parents and Citizens (or equivalent) meetings?

- At each meeting
- At most meetings
- At some meetings
- Never
- Unsure

Question 21

Does your school or early learning service have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group or equivalent?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Question 22

Does your school or early learning service have an employment strategy to encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for teaching and non-teaching positions?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Final questions

Question 23

Is this the first time your school or early learning service has engaged in formal action around reconciliation?

- Yes
- No, we previously developed a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)
- No, we have a reconciliation strategy, group or committee
- No, other
- Unsure

Question 24

Who completed this Reflection Survey?

- All of the RAP Working Group
- Some of the RAP Working Group
- The RAP Working Group Chair
- A RAP Working Group member
- Other

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.narragunnawali.org.au/rap-submission-faqs>